

Stalin's Secret War Plans

Why Hitler Invaded the Soviet Union

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When the German armed forces invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941, Berlin described the offensive as preemptive in the face of imminent Soviet aggression. The claim was generally dismissed as Nazi propaganda. Recently disclosed evidence from Soviet sources, however, suggests that Moscow's foreign policy was not governed by neutrality when Europe went to war in 1939.



Above is a German cemetery in Lithuania. From June to September of 1944, the Germans lost more than 1 million men - some to the Soviet army, some to the bitter cold.

Challenging established social and political structures through internal subversion, armed violence and terrorism, the Soviet Union was considered an outlaw state. It advocated the overthrow of all capitalist regimes and supported anti-colonial "independence movements" in underdeveloped territories. "This will invariably provoke the ruling classes of the Great Powers against us," the Communist Party's general secretary, Josef Stalin, told its Central Committee in 1925.¹

During the 1930s, Stalin, now dictator of the USSR, observed how Germany, revitalized under Adolf Hitler's leadership, worked to revise the post-World War I structure of Europe imposed by the United States, England and France. Stalin and Hitler, therefore, were both at odds with the West.

The USSR was an agrarian state, rich in natural resources, struggling with transition into an industrial power. More than half the necessary factory machinery was purchased from the United States. Germany survived economically by exporting manufactured goods and industrial equipment in exchange for raw materials. Fertile ground existed for German-Soviet cooperation.

On May 3, 1939, Stalin sacked the USSR's foreign commissar, Maxim Litvinov. Having previously concluded an alliance with Czechoslovakia and France, Litvinov was identified with Moscow's anti-German foreign policy of the decade. His replacement by Stalin with Vyatsheslav Molotov was recognized as a gesture toward Germany. Only days later in Berlin, Georgi Astachov, the Soviet Union's diplomatic advisor, thanked the German Foreign Office for the

respectful tenor the Reich's press had recently adopted toward the USSR.

That spring, London and Paris invited Moscow to co-sign an Anglo-French guarantee to protect Poland and Romania from German aggression. The Soviets made commitment contingent upon permission from Lithuania, Poland and Romania to allow the passage of Soviet troops in the event of war. Poland refused. The protracted Soviet-Allied negotiations were conducted halfheartedly by the West; its military advisors had a negative appraisal of the Red Army.

Moscow hosted an Anglo-French military mission August 12. The Soviet Union was represented by the chief of the general staff, Boris Shaposhnikov, Defense Commissar Kliment Voroshilov and the naval minister, Adm. Nikolai Kusnezov. The West sent second-rate negotiators with limited authority. The Soviets were insulted.

In August, Stalin decided on an agreement with Hitler. A non-aggression pact with Germany assured the Soviet Union tangible advantages. The Soviets would recover eastern Poland, which had formerly belonged to Imperial Russia. The Germans pledged support in the USSR's claims on Bessarabia and agreed to define Eastern Europe's Baltic and Balkan states as belonging to the Soviet "sphere of interest."

Germany was preparing to invade Poland in case **a territorial dispute** and **related grievances** defied peaceful settlement. England and France supported Poland. Stalin reasoned that were he to conclude a military compact with the West, the powerful coalition would probably discourage Hitler from war.

A German-Soviet non-aggression pact, however, would give Hitler a free hand to invade Poland. England, as Poland's ally, would declare war on Germany, drag a reluctant France into the conflagration, and Italy would rush to Hitler's side. The Soviet formula for national security rested with aggravating the conflicting interests among the "imperialist" nations and maintaining neutrality as these states expended their resources in a prolonged struggle.

Stalin had defined the premise during his March 10, 1939, speech in Moscow:

Nonintervention represents the endeavor... to allow all the warmongers to sink deeply into the mire of warfare, to quietly urge them on. The result will be that they weaken and exhaust one another. Then... (we will) appear on the scene with fresh forces and step in, naturally "in the interest of peace," to dictate terms to the weakened belligerents.²

On August 23, 1939, the German foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, was in Moscow. He and Molotov signed the historic German-Soviet non-aggression pact. The following evening, Stalin hosted prominent members of the Soviet Political Bureau in his apartment. Among the dinner guests were Molotov, Voroshilov, Lavrenti P. Beria and Nikita Khrushchev.

Stalin explained, as Khrushchev later recalled, that he considered war with Germany unavoidable, but had momentarily tricked Hitler and bought time. The Soviet premier described the treaty with Germany as a game of "who outwits whom."³ He concluded that the Soviet Union

held the advantage both morally and militarily. A few months later, the Soviet Foreign Office explained Stalin's decision in a telegram to its embassy in Tokyo: "The ratifying of our treaty with Germany was dictated by the need for a war in Europe."⁴

On August 25, 1939, the Swiss periodical *Revue de droit international* published the text of a speech Stalin delivered on August 19 to a closed session of the Political Bureau in Moscow. He was quoted as follows:

It must be our objective that Germany wage war long enough to exhaust England and France so much that they cannot defeat Germany alone.... Should Germany win, it will itself be so weakened that it won't be able to wage war against us for 10 years.... It's paramount for us that this war continues as long as possible, until both sides are worn out.⁵

In November, Stalin responded in *Pravda* that the Swiss article was a "heap of lies."⁶ (The Russian researcher T. S. Bushuyevoy discovered Stalin's original text in the former Soviet archives in 1994; it conformed to the Swiss version.)

Inside the USSR, an intensive armaments production program was under way. During 1938, it had increased by 39 percent, compared to 13 percent in civil industry. Emphasis was placed on armor, development of artillery and aeronautics. In September 1939 the USSR defense committee contracted the construction of nine aircraft production plants, and seven more to manufacture aircraft engines.

This was supplemented by the conversion to fabrication of aviation components of a number of consumer goods factories. In 1940, Soviet production of modern combat airplanes increased over 70 percent from the previous year. The ground forces experienced a parallel upgrading of weaponry. Between January 1939 and June 1941, the Red Army received over 7,000 new tanks and 82,000 artillery pieces (including mortars).

On June 26, 1940, a law was enacted extending the Soviet workday from seven to eight hours, and to seven days per week. Disciplinary action for tardiness or slothfulness in the factories was imposed on the work force. These are measures normally introduced during wartime.

Conscription swelled the ranks of the Red Army. A force numbering 1 million men in the spring of 1938 surpassed 5 million by June 1941. The growth was summarized by the historian Roger Reese: "There were 198 rifle divisions in 1941, compared to fewer than 30 in 1927; 31 motorized rifle divisions in 1941 and none in 1927; 61 tank divisions in 1941 and none as late as 1939."⁷

The spirit imbued in the military was illuminated in the revised, 1939 edition of the Red Army's field service regulations. It stated that should war be "forced" on Soviet Russia, "We will conduct the war offensively and carry it onto enemy territory."⁸

In December 1939, the U.S. military attaché in Sweden reported to the War Department in Washington his assessment of the Red Army:

The soldiers are practically all peasants or common laborers... fed with a constant stream of propaganda extolling the virtues of Communism and assuring them that

they are making some sacrifices in the present in order that it may eventually triumph throughout the world. Being unbelievably simple-minded and kept in total ignorance of conditions outside Russia, many of them are actually almost fanatical in their zeal for what they have been led to believe is a holy crusade to rescue their own class from villainous oppressors.⁹



This absurd propaganda poster reads: "Soldiers of the Red Army save us!" The Russian people were gullible and tended to believe communist propaganda. As a result, they fought valiantly against the invaders.

The war in Europe did not develop as Stalin had predicted. In the spring of 1940, the British withdrew from the continent. The German army conquered France in June without suffering appreciable losses. The ground war was wrapping up without England and Germany becoming "sufficiently worn down." Khrushchev later described how Stalin became unusually agitated following the Franco-German cease-fire in June 1940. He cursed the French for letting themselves be beaten and the English for fleeing "as fast as their legs could carry them."¹⁰

The Soviets seized a generous portion of Eastern Europe only days before France's surrender. In September and October 1939, the Soviet government had negotiated permission with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to establish military bases at their Baltic ports. In June 1940, Molotov reproached the Lithuanian prime minister, Anastas Merkys, for the alleged poor security provided the Soviet garrison; a Red Army soldier had supposedly been bushwhacked. On June 14, Molotov presented Lithuania's foreign minister with an ultimatum demanding reinforcement of the Soviet military contingent to prevent further "provocation." The diminutive republic acquiesced.

Similar ultimatums were presented to Latvia and Estonia. On the 21st, the Baltic states were declared Soviet republics, following sham elections. Molotov told the Lithuanian foreign minister on June 30, "Now we're convinced more than ever that the brilliant comrade Lenin was not wrong in asserting that World War II will bring us to power in Europe, just as World War I helped us to power in Russia."¹¹

When Moscow presented its demand on June 23 to reoccupy Bessarabia, the formerly Russian eastern province of Romania, Ribbentrop pledged Germany's support. He asked only that the sovereignty of Romania's remaining territory be respected, to safeguard the Reich's economic interests.

Apologists for the USSR, and they abound among historians and sociologists in democratic countries, excuse these Soviet land grabs as defensive measures. The threat of potential German aggression supposedly compelled Moscow to extend the USSR's frontiers to blunt the impetus of a German offensive. The premise ignores the fact that the Soviet operations in the Baltic and into Bessarabia occurred opposite a virtually undefended German border. Four German infantry divisions and six militia divisions protected the demarcation

line shared with the Soviet Union. Two were transferred to the western front in June.

Stalin possessed a splendid espionage network, which consistently forewarned him of German plans. His spies could not have failed to observe (and report) that there were no German deliberations regarding an invasion of the USSR at that time. The atmosphere in Foreign Armies East, the German general staffs section assigned to matters related to the Red Army, was described by Maj. Erich Helmdach, who was posted there in July 1940:

I found genuinely peacetime conditions in the department. The air war against England generated far greater interest. There was no trace of "war preparations," except that a Soviet film, *The Breakthrough into the Mannerheim Line*, a documentary about the Soviet winter war in Finland, was screened for the general staff officers. The post-film summary by Col. (Eberhard) Kinzel was limited solely to disparaging observations on the military achievements of the Red Army and its antiquated combat ordnance.¹²

How little the Soviets themselves promoted the "national security" pretext is illuminated by Molotov's remarks in an address to the Supreme Soviet on August 1, 1940. Citing the USSR's successful foreign policy, he stipulated that the Soviet Union should not be content with what had been achieved. In Stalin's words, the foreign commissar proclaimed, the nation must maintain a state of mobilization to wrest further successes: "We will achieve new and even more glorious victories for the Soviet Union."¹³

That summer, diplomatic relations with Germany deteriorated. When the Soviets exerted political pressure to gain control of Finland's nickel production (the Germans had contracted to purchase 75 percent of the yield), Hitler garrisoned the Finnish nickel mines at Petsamo with elite mountain troops. After the Red Army occupied Bessarabia, the Führer signed a treaty with Bucharest in August, pledging to protect Romania from aggression.

In November 1940, Molotov traveled to Berlin to confer with Hitler and Ribbentrop. During the talks, the Soviet visitor belabored the German military presence in Finland and the Reich's guarantee to safeguard Romanian sovereignty. This, he protested, was an infringement on the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. All conciliatory arguments introduced by Hitler, Molotov resisted. The catalog of demands for Soviet preeminence in practically every region where Germany and the Soviet Union shared interests, which Molotov heaped on Ribbentrop during the final session, brought the diplomatic exchange to a fiasco.

The question arises what Molotov, presenting patently unacceptable demands, expected to achieve through these negotiations. The contemporary German historian Walter Post offers this analysis:

Moscow had to fear that England would either be finished off by a German amphibious operation, or, due to its military weakness and miserable financial situation, find itself ready to conclude a peaceful compromise with the Reich. The Soviet Union would then stand alone against a Germany that controlled the resources of the entire European continent. Moreover, the Soviet Union saw the danger of a cooperative

effort among all the capitalist powers, including the Anglo-Saxons, against the USSR. To prevent this possibility, England had to be encouraged to continue waging war... To reinforce this hope and prevent a German landing operation against England, Moscow had to seek a conflict with Germany. With the threat of Soviet expansion toward Scandinavia and the Balkans in his rear, Hitler could not risk operation Sea Lion (the invasion plan for England). Instead, he had to transfer strong formations of his armed forces to the east to protect Germany's supply sources of nickel, lumber, oil and grain.¹⁴

In December 1940, Soviet intelligence obtained a copy of a top-secret directive drafted by the Führer on the 18th. It opened with the words, "The German armed forces must be prepared, even before the conclusion of the war with England, to defeat Soviet Russia in a rapid campaign."¹⁵ The document contained general military objectives in the east and specified that preparations had to be completed by May 15, 1941.

Late in 1940, the attention of Hitler and Stalin shifted to southeastern Europe. Germany was the only great power capable of protecting the Balkans from Soviet aggression. This was instrumental in Ribbentrop's persuading the governments of Hungary and Romania to join the Three Power Pact, the German-Italian alliance system, in November 1940. Bulgaria followed on March 1, 1941.

Hitler's purpose was to arbitrate local border disputes and solicit permission to move an army through Romania and Bulgaria to invade Greece. Molotov bombarded the German embassy in Moscow with official protests. Germany, he scolded, had acknowledged in the August 1939 non-aggression pact that these states belonged to the Soviet sphere of interest. (The USSR's occupation of the Baltic states in June 1940 demonstrated how Moscow interpreted the classification, "sphere of interest.")

A sharper confrontation developed over Yugoslavia. Though its cabinet yielded to German pressure to enter the Three Power Pact, factions within the government and the military received discreet encouragement from England, the United States and Soviet Russia. During a visit to Ankara, the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, was told by Yugoslavia's ambassador that Moscow had reassured him that were Yugoslavia attacked by the Germans, the USSR was ready to aid the defenders.

On March 27, 1941, the pro-German Yugoslavian government was toppled by a coup. Hitler directed his general staff to prepare an invasion. The German army group poised in Bulgaria to strike Greece would simultaneously invade Yugoslavia, supported by another German force deployed in southern Germany.

The new Yugoslavian government anticipated a military alliance with the USSR. Yugoslavia's ambassador in Moscow, Milan Gavrilovic, was told by Stalin, "I hope that your army can stop the Germans for a long time. You have mountains and forests, where tanks are ineffective."¹⁶ He urged the Yugoslavians to organize guerrilla warfare. Gavrilovic was then bounced to Molotov, who explained to him he was the "victim of a misunderstanding, since it had never been intended to conclude a military alliance with Yugoslavia, or support Yugoslavia militarily."¹⁷ Red Army formations along the western frontier were

simply placed on combat alert four days after the Germans invaded Yugoslavia in April. This was calculated to force Hitler to beef up his defenses opposite the USSR and relieve pressure on the Yugoslavian army.

This saber rattling by the Soviets was a rare public manifestation of the Soviet military presence in the western zone. In general, the Soviet media denied rumors of troop concentrations along the frontier. The defense committee had been secretly transferring combat divisions there since the summer of 1940. In April 1941, the Ural and Siberian military districts were ordered to release more formations. On May 13, an additional 28 divisions, nine corps headquarters and four army headquarters were relocated from the Russian interior. By June, according to recent Russian archival estimates, the Soviet armed forces had deployed 2.7 million men near the western frontier; the equivalent of 177 divisions.¹⁸

This enormous fighting force was allocated 10,394 tanks, over 1,300 of which were the formidable types KV and T-34. The army was supported by nearly 44,000 field guns and mortars. Over 8,000 combat aircraft occupied forward airdromes. The western military districts established command posts close to the frontier. Army staffs and front administrative personnel were ordered transferred there in mid-June.

One hundred Soviet divisions were positioned in eastern Poland alone. A high proportion of armored and mechanized formations deployed near Bialystok and Lvov, behind geographic bulges protruding westward along the German-Soviet demarcation line. In a 1972 book, Marshal Ivan Bagramyan, in 1941 a colonel in the Red Army, commented on the troop disposition around Lvov: "We regarded it a favorable assembly area in case we had to initiate widespread offensive operations. It was no accident that two of our full strength, most combat ready mechanized corps, the Fourth and the Eighth, were concentrated there."¹⁹

As for the Bialystok area, the Soviet Maj. Gen. Pyotr Grigorenko later offered this perspective:

More than half the troops of the Western Special Military District were stationed around Bialystok and to the west, therefore in territory extending like a wedge deeply into that of the probable enemy. A troop arrangement of this kind would only have been justifiable... if these troops had been earmarked to launch a surprise attack. Otherwise, half of them would have been surrounded in a moment.²⁰

The philosophy of the Red Army was attack oriented. The chief of staff, Georgi Zhukov, described the training at the Soviet general staff academy:

Participants in the course were instructed that wars are no longer declared; the aggressor strives far more to insure all the advantages of a surprise attack... The strategy of warfare is above all anchored in the correct



Here, in "reactionary" classical Cyrillic, it is written: "Whosoever shall come to us with the sword shall perish by it. Upon this stood and stands the land of Russia." That was written by St. Alexander Nevsky

thesis that the aggressor can only be beaten through offensive operations. Other variables of battle, such as counterthrusts, fighting to cover retreats and operations in case of encirclement, were, with few individual exceptions, only touched upon.²¹

(1220-1263). During World War II, Stalinist Russia briefly became the most conservative country in Europe.

During May 1941, Zhukov and the defense commissar, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, prepared an operational study for Red Army deployment in case of war with Germany. It was based on an initial plan submitted to Stalin the previous September. The May document included the following recommendation:

In total, Germany and its allies can deploy 240 divisions against the Soviet Union. Considering that Germany, through the arrangement of its rearward services, can keep its army readily mobilized, it could deploy ahead of us and carry out a surprise attack. To prevent this and defeat the German army, I regard it as necessary to under no circumstances relinquish the initiative to the German high command; but to deploy ahead of the enemy and then attack the Germany army right when it is forming up, has not established a front and cannot organize the combat operations of its allied forces.²²

On May 5, Stalin and assorted Soviet dignitaries attended commencement at the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow. During the following banquet, he proposed several toasts and talked volubly. An abridged transcript of Stalin's remarks that day, from Soviet archives, was ultimately published by the Russian historian Lev Besyemski in the March 1992 issue of the periodical *Osteuropa*.

Stalin lauded the modernization of the Red Army. He rebuffed Gen. Michail Chosin, the director of the Frunze academy, for proposing a toast to the USSR's peaceful foreign policy. The dictator substituted these words:

Now that we have become strong, one must go from defense over to the attack. To accomplish the defense of our country we are obliged to take the offensive.... We must reform our instruction, our propaganda, agitation, our press to pervade an attack spirit. The Red Army is a modern army, and a modern army is an offensive army.²³

The Russian archives have never released the uncensored text of Stalin's commencement speech. The deleted portions may be revealed, however, by the testimony of four Soviet officers who attended the graduation ceremony. Captured by the Germans, Maj. Ivan Yevstifeyev, Maj. Pissmeny, Maj. Gen. Andrei Naumov and Maj. Gen. Vassili Malyshkin had no contact during captivity, but their recollections of Stalin's remarks are practically identical.

The witnesses testified that Stalin had described the German army's "occupation" of Bulgaria and transfer of troops to Finland as "reasons for a war against Germany."²⁴ Discussing the preparedness of the Red Army, Stalin heralded its intended employment:

For us, the war plans are ready... In the course of the next two months we can begin the struggle against Germany. It may surprise you that I'm telling you our war plans, but it has to be. We must take this step for our protection and take

revenge for Bulgaria and Finland. There is a peace treaty with Germany, but that's just an illusion, a curtain behind which we can work.²⁵

That same May 5, the military propaganda section received guidelines for "the tasks of political propaganda for the Red Army in the immediate future." The outline stated that "members of the Red Army must be prepared for a justifiable, offensive war." It further stipulated, "the present perception among many Red Army soldiers, commanders and political cadres that the German army... must be destroyed."²⁶

Ten days later, Stalin dictated a personal directive for the Red Army:

The present international situation, which is filled with unforeseeable possibilities, demands revolutionary decisiveness and constant readiness to launch a crushing advance upon the enemy... The soldiers are to be schooled in the spirit of an active hatred of the enemy and to aspire to take up the struggle against him, to be ready to defend our fatherland on the territory of the enemy and deal him a mortal blow.²⁷

Along the frontier, the German and Soviet field armies were massing for an imminent confrontation. German reconnaissance aircraft flew frequent sorties to monitor the Red Army. Stalin issued standing orders forbidding his troops to fire on them. The Soviet host, grossly underestimated by German military intelligence, continued to augment. "All the spare capacity of the entire national rail transport system had been taken up with this major and secret operation," observed the former Soviet staff officer Viktor Suvorov. He points out that this large Soviet force could not, as Molotov would claim, have assembled in the west for summer training exercises.

The mobilized divisions could not have returned to the distant lands from whence they came. Such a move again would have absorbed the entire resources of the rail network for many months and would have resulted in economic catastrophe.²⁸

The nature of these formations was illuminated in Suvorov's 1990 book, *Icebreaker*:

The basis of Soviet strategy was the "operation in depth" theory.... The shock army was to... deliver those strikes in depth. Set up purely to solve offensive tasks, these shock armies had... a considerable quantity of artillery and infantry whose purpose it was to break the enemy's defense, and one or two mechanized corps with 500 tanks each... On June 21, 1941, all the Soviet armies on the German and Romanian borders... were of shock army standard.²⁹

It was unfeasible to maintain such an overwhelming military presence to protect against a potential German invasion. The region lacked sufficient shelters for winter, and there was a dearth of training facilities, such as firing ranges, to maintain the army's combat preparedness. Shaposhnikov himself had stressed the necessity of committing soldiers to action shortly after deployment on the frontier; not only does their sense of readiness otherwise lapse, but such a troop buildup can only remain concealed from the potential enemy for a limited time.

Neither political nor military documents fixing the date for a surprise offensive against Germany are available. Soviet officers captured during the fighting testified that many anticipated the order to attack in August or September 1941. Some said that combat operations were scheduled to begin early in July.

The Soviet leadership, however, faced a serious concern. Stalin received reports that the Germans were preparing to invade the Soviet Union in June. His army on the front was undergoing feverish reorganization. Units were receiving new ordinance, recruit training was under way, many formations were under-strength. Other divisions were still en route by rail. It was estimated that the army would not be combat ready before the end of August. The dilemma is illuminated by Walter Post:



A wounded Russian, captured in a skirmish, is treated by a Finnish nurse in a field hospital. Soviet soldiers were told by communist political officers that they would be shot or tortured by the Finns if taken prisoner. Despite these lying warnings, many soldiers surrendered to the Finns, and were alive and unharmed when the war ended.

The rapid progress of the German deployment and the reports piling up about the Germans' intention to attack in the latter half of June confronted the Soviet command with the problem of either changing the entire war plan to the strategic defensive, or advancing its own timetable for attack... A strategic defense would have required a total revision of the troop disposition, which because of the poor rail network could not be carried out in a short time.... The Soviet command had at this late hour no other choice but to maintain poise, camouflage its own deploying of forces as much as possible and hope for enough time to complete the concentration of its troops and attack according to plan.³⁰

The Soviets hoped that were the German army to strike first, the initial thrust need not be decisive. "They felt the covering armies were fully sufficient to repulse an enemy attack while Soviet main forces were mobilizing and deploying to launch a counteroffensive."³¹ The Red Army, as the German historian Max Klüver relates, "was in every branch schooled in attack and trained for the capability of responding to an enemy attack with an immediate counterblow."³²

The Soviet general staff, however, had failed to appreciate how quickly the German army, upon arriving on the frontier, could launch an offensive. Shaposhnikov had estimated 10 to 15 days. To the Red Army's unpleasant surprise, the German armored and motorized divisions, right after reaching the border, struck with full fury. The captive Gen. Andrei Vlasov's remarks on the subject in 1942 were summarized by a German intelligence officer:

The Soviets had been forming up since the beginning of the year, which, due to the bad Soviet railroad lines, went rather slowly. Hitler judged the situation perfectly and plowed right into the Soviets while they were deploying. This is how Vlasov explains the Germans' enormous initial success.³³

Like any novel concept assailing accepted views, the premise that Hitler may have only technically been the aggressor in the German-Soviet war has encountered resistance. Among the opponents of the revisionist position is David Glantz, who introduces new evidence to defend established views. An authority on Soviet military affairs, Glantz provides a comprehensive analysis of the 1941 Red Army in his study, *Stumbling Colossus*. He argues that rapid expansion since 1939, among other factors, made the USSR's fighting forces unprepared to conduct a military operation in the scope of the purported preemptive offensive against Germany. Soviet commanders, as reflected at that time in their military periodicals, "demonstrated a clear Soviet appreciation of the superb German military performance... and an unmistakable realization that the Soviet military in no way matched German military standards."³⁴

Glantz provides evidence that troops were unfamiliar with new ordnance, service branches of the army lacked experience in coordinated operations, and the level of training among inductees was inadequate. In the 37th Tank Division, for example, "About 60 percent of the enlisted personnel had joined the army in May 1941, and none had any general or specialized training."³⁵

Glantz publishes a July 1941 analysis of the Soviet 15th Mechanized Corps on the first day of fighting by its acting commander, in which the officer states that personnel in the corps' motorcycle regiment had never fired a rifle.³⁶ *Stumbling Colossus* also mentions that the "majority of KV and T-34 [tank] drivers had from three to five hours of service driver training."³⁷ Aware of the military's predicament, Glantz concludes, Stalin sought diplomatic solutions to problems with Germany.

The American professor Roger Reese summarizes that expansion of the army "was pursued at a frantic if not altogether paranoid pace" since 1939, largely out of fear of Germany. The Red Army "inconsistently changed unit organization and reshuffled its leaders, creating a great deal of confusion, instability and systemic incoherence."³⁸

Glantz's book in particular is worthwhile for balancing the perspective of recently available information. However, related factors should also be considered. The fact that the Red Army was experiencing a difficult period of reorganization, modernization and expansion from 1939 to 1941 did not prevent Stalin from employing it as an instrument of foreign policy. The invasion of Poland and the occupation of the Baltic republics and Bessarabia delayed progress in improving the army. A 1939-40 winter war against Finland cost the troops a quarter of a million casualties and widespread demoralization. Stalin was not deterred by the disastrous impact Soviet imperialism exercised on the struggling military establishment.

The question arises, did the Soviet general staff really consider the fighting forces inadequate? Why would Zhukov and Timoshenko, who overestimated German strength, prepare an operational study for invading central Europe? "There is no direct evidence that Stalin ever saw it," Glantz maintains.³⁹ The study was dated May 15, 1941, and addressed to Stalin.

The Russian historian Col. Valeriy Danilov argues that it would be absurd to presume that the Soviet defense commissar and the chief of

staff would have prepared such a document to set before Stalin without authorization. Such arbitrary conduct by officers would have represented a rebuke against Soviet policy and implied that Stalin was in error. Considering the 1937 purge of the military hierarchy, it is doubtful that staff officers would have risked antagonizing him.⁴⁰ It is more plausible that the study was accomplished on his orders.

The controversy will continue, at least until the former Allied powers Britain, the United States and Russia, whose governments have liberally exposed Germany's wartime records, release the relevant material in their own archives. The Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* of April 4, 1997 quoted the Moscow journalist Konstantin Preobrashenskiy about use of the Russian archives. "Once again, the archivists only approve access to the documents when they feel like it. It is regrettable to see how what was accessible yesterday is today closed once more."⁴¹

Notes:

[Bibliography]

¹Thadden, pp. 26-27 [...back...](#)

²*ibid.*, p. 29. [...back...](#)

³Post, p. 123. [...back...](#)

⁴Thadden, p. 88 [...back...](#)

⁵*ibid.*, pp. 89-90. [...back...](#)

⁶*ibid.*, pp. 99-100. [...back...](#)

⁷Reese, p. 35. [...back...](#)

⁸Klüver, p. 112. [...back...](#)

⁹Glantz, p. 33. [...back...](#)

¹⁰Post, p. 145. [...back...](#)

¹¹Klüver, p. 106. [...back...](#)

¹²Helmdach, p. 15. [...back...](#)

¹³Klüver, p. 282. [...back...](#)

¹⁴Post, p. 184. [...back...](#)

¹⁵*ibid.*, p. 390. [...back...](#)

¹⁶Klüver, p. 259. [...back...](#)

¹⁷*ibid.* [...back...](#)

¹⁸Glantz, p. 293. [...back...](#)

¹⁹Klüver, p. 110. [...back...](#)

²⁰Post, p. 293. [...back...](#)

- ²¹*ibid.*, p. 260. [...back...](#)
- ²²*ibid.*, p. 282. [...back...](#)
- ²³*ibid.*, p. 276. [...back...](#)
- ²⁴Thadden, p. 105. [...back...](#)
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- ²⁸Suvorov, Viktor, "Who Was Planning to Attack Whom in June 1941, Hitler or Stalin?" [...back...](#)
- ²⁹Suvorov, Viktor, *Icebreaker*, pp. 141, 144. [...back...](#)
- ³⁰Post, pp. 298, 281. [...back...](#)
- ³¹Glantz, p. 96. [...back...](#)
- ³²Klüver, p. 282. [...back...](#)
- ³³Post, p. 298. [...back...](#)
- ³⁴Glantz, p. 259. [...back...](#)
- ³⁵*ibid.*, p. 142. [...back...](#)
- ³⁶*ibid.*, p. 136. [...back...](#)
- ³⁷*ibid.*, p. 135 [...back...](#)
- ³⁸Reese, p. 163. [...back...](#)
- ³⁹Glantz, p. 95. [...back...](#)
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